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ABSTRACT

Recent recommendations by the European Commission would have all secondary students in the European Community (EC) studying two EC languages other than their own. In multicultural Australia, where English is a shared language, students are encouraged to study other languages, especially "trade" languages that are also the home languages of many students; however, this policy does not yet have widespread support. The attitude is reflected in low language enrollments at the higher education level. The interdependence of economics and politics is supported in the popular press, but the interdependence of economic efficiency and cultural context is only recently gaining recognition. Australian policy on multiculturalism and immigrant employment have not evolved sufficiently yet. Australia can afford to and is beginning to shed its ambivalence and indulge in linguistic pluralism, including acceptance of the language and culture of the aboriginal population. Misinterpretations of multiculturalism and fears of lost heritage have shaped attitudes and policy too long. Inconsistency in language education policy and trade policy should also be remedied. Hasty improvisation in language program planning is unwise, but sound policy based on broader perspectives and developing the full range of available human resources is necessary. (MSE)

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LANGUAGE AND ECONOMY IN THEIR CULTURAL ENVELOPE

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The French economist and Nobel Prizewinner, Maurice Allais, (1989, p.14) wrote recently that it is futile to expect effective solutions to the many problems facing European economic union, if there is no European cultural community among the participants. To succeed economically the union needs to develop a "European spirit which can over-ride chauvinistic and particularist tendencies". Such an European over-arching value system or "spirit" is "the preliminary condition for forging any real economic community". **In this way he formally places economy within its cultural envelope.** But in doing so he does not advocate some artificial or forced imposition of cultural uniformity in all areas of life :

> If we wish to forge a genuine economic community and the political community on which it is dependent, if we want to achieve a real European humanism based on a fair balance among the various languages and cultures rather than on the domination of one language and one culture over the others, we will have to make sweeping reforms in the higher education system of each of our countries(..) The construction of Europe presupposes an ability to handle several languages, or at least three.

While he acknowledges the growing predominance of the English language, especially in the world of science and technology, he rejects the notion of English as the sole common medium of communication between Europeans (say, French and German or Spanish and

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Italian), since the "language of a people constitutes a part of its soul" and its loss would jeopardise its culture. "Over and above the question of defending our languages, it is really a matter of joining together to defend our cultures". And the loss of these cultures would inevitably, he claims, deprive Europe of its political autonomy and economic viability.

Allais's fears of the "hegemony" of the English language as a tool of "Anglo-American domination" of Europe could be viewed as the rather petulant cry of a Frenchman disappointed at the decline of French as a modern international language. Nevertheless, his suspicion of linguistic uniformity as the prelude to loss of cultural autonomy and economic buoyancy may well be justified. As Tsuda (1986, p.49) confirms, "Language is far from neutral, but it is actually a system of beliefs, values and interpretations emphasized and handed down in a certain culture. Hence the adoption of a certain language leads to the dominance of that culture's practices and the submission to [its] other cultural values".

Recent events in Eastern Europe and the virtual collapse of the economies of those countries show the futility not only of centralised economic planning but also of a rigidly controlled system that takes no account of regional linguistic variations or of the "cultural envelope" of ethnic groups, other than the dominant one. When the dictatorial political controls in the USSR were relaxed, the subordinated peoples, even whole nations, reasserted their cultural autonomy, both for its own sake and as a necessary step in their quest for economic self-management. In the wake of perestroika, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have all taken gradual but inexorable steps to reclaim their cultural autonomy, with the greatest stress placed on

making their ethnic tongues the official languages of these Soviet republics. This demand for linguistic and cultural autonomy has even taken precedence over the declaration of a policy of economic "home rule", with claims of sovereignty over the republics' lands, forests, waters and mineral resources.

President Gorbachev could hardly oppose these "Baltic reforms" in the face of the economic collapse of the former Russian-dominated system, based upon policies that took Lenin at his word by paying only lip service to the multi-ethnic population of the country, and giving hardly any regard to their varying linguistic, cultural and economic needs. In partially endorsing the Baltic republics' proposals, the central authorities are acquiescing in the growing conviction that the economy flourishes only when needless energy is not wasted on cultural suppression and, instead, the culture of the people is made to provide a springboard for economic activity.

In speaking about the need for a cultural and economic balance among the nations of the U.S.S.R., Gorbachev (July 1989) went so far as to say :

> The appropriate solution of these matters will to a large extent determine peace and prosperity of our people, the fate of perestroika and - if I can put it this way - the fate and integrity of our state.

Fears about the cohesion and resilience of the state if its cultural and economic problems remain unsettled appear justified in view of the tensions that are a legacy of the former period of suppression and stagnation, as witnessed by protests in the Caucasus and Uzbekistan. It would seem, therefore, that there are a number of

very topical examples to act as a warning against the homogenisation of culture through the exercise of hegemony by the major group within a political union, since such dominance has proved to be counter-productive both economically and culturally.

Language Policies in the European Community and Australia

As if in partial response to Allais's wish for a linguistic pluralism that would be internalized within each individual European, so that he/she could retain his/her cultural distinctiveness and yet be able to communicate with others, the European Commission has recently made important recommendations in relation to language learning. It has been agreed that in member countries of the European Community (EC), all secondary school students should be studying two EC languages, other than their own. The British government's own Education Reform Act of 1988 falls far short of this goal, and Mrs. Thatcher has been criticized even within her own country and party for its limited vision.

The British Act includes an Order on "Modern Foreign Languages" (that came into force on August 1, 1989) with only one basic requirement, namely that "all maintained schools" offer one of the EC languages. Although all pupils are obliged to study at least one language other than English, this is limited to years 7-9 of their schooling. This need not be an EC language in every case, since once the requirement to offer an EC language is met by the school, it may then offer its pupils other languages, which are selected either as being those of "major trading partners" (such as Arabic or Chinese), or as those "commonly used in ethnic communities" (such as Hindi or Punjabi).

Although the Act has been criticized in Europe for its limited scope in comparison with the efforts of other members to foster linguistic pluralism within the Community, its provisions are even less favourable to Britain's own minority communities which may wish to have their languages included in the curriculum. The Act "does not give pupils the right to demand" the inclusion of their home language in the curriculum (whatever their proportion in the school), while the school itself is only obliged to provide instruction in an EC language (Department of Education and Science (U.K.), 1989).

The situation in Australia differs from that of the European Community in that while in Europe there is no one single "mainstream" language which is shared by all Europeans, Australian multiculturalism finds its "spirit" reflected in an over-arching framework of values, including a shared language, namely English (Smolicz, 1984; National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, 1989). Since the last war, Australian language and culture policies have undergone a major evolution that have gradually taken cognisance of the changing demographic, economic and cultural composition of society. While there are variations between states, and fluctuations in the articulation of federal government approaches, current policies may be viewed as generally quite positive to the notion of additive bilingualism at an individual level. Students with English as their family language are being encouraged to acquire another language at school. Most recently special emphasis has been placed on what has been termed "trade" languages, which are generally assumed to be East Asian, particularly Japanese (Asian Studies Council, 1988). Students from minority ethnic non-English speaking background can ideally maintain their home language and develop literacy in it; opt for the

study of a totally new language - whether European or Asian; or do both these things (Commonwealth Department of Education:Lo Bianco Report, 1987).

The new language policy is still, however, only at the embryonic stage, and it is already possible to discern some unfortunate misunderstandings, such as an artificial cleavage between "mother tongue" development for "minority ethnics", and "Asia-literacy" programs for students from English speaking background. A certain confusion about goals and their erratic and uneven implementation in different States may also reduce the impact of such initiatives upon the predominantly monolingual character of the majority of the people. There is a paradox in the fact that Australia is fortunate in having English as the dominant (and national) language, which links it with the world-wide community of English speaking nations while, at the same time, the majority of its people are "disadvantaged by a general lack of facility in other languages" (National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, 1989, p.39). Another paradox is that, while almost 87% of the population over the age of five speaks no other language save English in their homes (Clyne, 1988, p.22), some 370,000 people from among ethnic minority groups are grossly deficient in their knowledge of English.

Furthermore, there still appears insufficient acceptance of the need to make the study of a language other than English (LOTE) into a compulsory subject, even though some states have formulated a variety of plans, such as an undertaking to provide at least one LOTE for all primary school students by 1995 (South Australian Ministerial Task Force on Multiculturalism and Education, 1984). According to the South Australian Director General of Education, Dr. Ken Boston

(1989) South Australia "seeks to affirm and promote cultural and linguistic diversity for all students through the application of "Culturally Inclusive Education". This includes the expansion of existing LOTE programs in schools that already teach eighteen languages to one third of the State's primary and secondary school students. This expansion is to be achieved through almost trebling the number of LOTE teachers in 1990. It is also significant that the chief executive officer of South Australia's state schools affirmed as his Department's "main priority", the "mother tongue development of students", as well as the teaching of "the total range of languages" - including "geopolitical", "traditional" and "community" languages.

These developments at a school level find their reflection in higher education in an effort to improve the current dismal level of language education, with only about 4 per cent of undergraduates in South Australia studying a LOTE. Under the preliminary recommendations of the South Australian Institute of Languages Report (1989), "all university and higher education students in South Australia would be obliged to study a second language for at least a year - either at a University or during the twelfth year of their schooling (Donaghy, 1989). At the same time, South Australia's Second Report of the Enquiry into Immediate Post-Compulsory Education (Gilding Report, 1989) still shied away from making LOTE a compulsory subject for the South Australian Certificate of Education. In contrast, New South Wales seems determined to forge ahead and be the first State in Australia where a LOTE course becomes a required school subject, initially starting with year 7 students, and in 1993 exploring its extension to cover years 7 and 8 (New South Wales Department of Education, 1989, p.14). However, the extent to which such plans will be fulfilled by 1993 still remains unclear, since at

present in the country as a whole less than 20% of school students study a language other than English. Indeed, "until recent Government initiatives, the proportion studying languages in senior secondary and tertiary education had been in long-term decline". (National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, 1989, p.39).

The Culture-Economy Interface in Australia

Current Australian interest in the teaching of Asian languages can be traced to a growing recognition that the goal of economic efficiency cannot be divorced from its cultural context. The appreciation of the inter-dependence of economy and politics, on the one hand, with language and culture on the other, finds support in the popular press, as illustrated by a recent thoughtful analysis by P.M. McGuinness (1989, p.17). There is some debate about which particular aspect of culture is of greatest significance - when culture is understood as encompassing a variety of systems, be they political, social, economic or ideological (Znaniecki, 1968). Allais, as a Frenchman, has nominated the French language as the core of his culture. This linguistic core is seen as necessary to sustain the nation's identity and vital powers of creativity, as well as its economic well-being. Others might query whether the "soul" of every nation invariably resides in its ethno- specific tongue, although it undoubtedly does in the case of the Baltic peoples.

The theory of core values argues that some ethnic groups are more language-centered than others, and that for some nations other cultural factors, such as a specific religion, social structure or racial affiliation may prove of greater core significance than

language (Smolicz, 1981a; Smolicz and Secombe, 1989). Whatever the core, there is a strong case for the view that one way in which a nation can dominate over others, or one ethnic group over other groups within the same country, is by obliterating the 'competing' core values and reducing the subordinated cultures to domestic, non-literary remnants.

Such a conclusion is hardly novel for most of the nations of Asia which have experienced extended periods of colonial rule and whose cultures have been denigrated as "inferior", "old fashioned" or "non-scientific", and hence unsuitable to catalyse economic development without the assistance of some European lingua franca and cultural know-how. The flourishing economy of N.E. Asia and the rapid strides in the South-East part of the continent indicate the ethnocentric error of such views. In the early settlement days of Australia even more sinister labels were applied to the Aboriginal cultures, as well as those of non-British settlers which were perceived as a handicap and a burden to be shed as soon as possible. The danger has been that it was the core values that were being shed, in a way that endangered the culture's integrity, its creative powers, and its ability to sustain the intellectual and economic effort of youth (Smolicz, 1981b).

How much of the current "multicultural concerns", and particularly the desire to arrest the wastage of talent of migrants, has been due to the increasing appreciation of the social and economic benefits of multiculturalism, a reduced demand for unskilled labour, or the desire for social justice, is difficult to ascertain. It is sufficient to say that "multicultural programs" could be viewed as a delayed "reflex action" to the growing realization that, at least in

part, Australia's current economic difficulties can be ascribed to failure to recognize new world demands for superior knowledge and to arrest the wastage of overseas-derived skills. A Minister in the South Australian government described this delay in Australia's response as, "our cultural blinkers, a colonial hangover which tied our ways of thinking about and dealing with the world to Australia's English-speaking roots" (Sumner, 1988, p.12). In order to reverse the decline, Australia has to increase the role of its manufacturing sector by placing greater emphasis on developing its human resources. Another goal about which there is general agreement is the need for a more successful and customer-sensitive trade policy which can be supported by the intelligent use of Australia's diverse cultural assets.

Such shortcomings cannot be made good simply by the recognition among employer groups and trade unions of the real gains that can accrue from "on-the-job" English training, in terms of increased productivity, greater job satisfaction and reduced tensions in the workplace. Vital as such English language training is, and however vigorously it is promoted in the name of multiculturalism, when taken alone, it still fails to liberate and make use of the linguistic resources other than English, which remain locked within the multi-ethnic workforce. In fact, the diversity of knowledge, which is inherent in Australia's multicultural base, should provide the best springboard for successful trading with our partners in the Asia-Pacific region and elsewhere. This is because Australian society itself, where cultures constantly interact and more than one language is spoken for the purpose of communication and wealth creation, represents the best possible training ground for dealing with a multicultural world market.

The view that if Australia neglects its "internal" multi-culturalism, it can hardly succeed in the external pluralistic environment, has been most clearly articulated by Sumner (1988, p.12) when he asserted :

> We need to challenge the insular view of life that Australians have retained for too long. Through ... recognizing that Australia must play its part in an increasingly integrated world economy, we face the challenge of giving life and substance to a multicultural community within our own country. For how, ultimately, do we deal with a multicultural world market and community, if at home we fail to deal effectively in social, political and economic terms with our own cultural diversity?

Despite such clarion calls for the full realization and integration of all Australians' various skills and intellectual attributes, whether acquired inside the country or elsewhere, there still remains a substantial pool of immigrants, both tradespeople and professionals, who are not working in jobs for which they were trained overseas. Furthermore, according to the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia (1989, p.26), "that number is growing annually". They are prevented from entering professions, trades and jobs for which they were trained, by various factors including language barriers, lack of opportunity for further study and work experience and the persistent reluctance to provide adequate recognition of overseas qualifications by a variety of professional and trade groups. Indeed, there is a paradox in that present Australian policy assesses potential immigrants on the contribution they can make to the country's economic development; at the same time, it fails to ensure that those immigrants who are already settled

in Australia actually make use of the skills acquired overseas for their own benefit, and for the benefit of all Australians.

The solution of this problem is a complex one and lies substantially outside the immediate reach of the Federal ministers and within the competence of State governments and professional organizations. However, the Commonwealth government has embarked in 1989 on a comprehensive program of reform including the establishment of the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) and of the National Training Board to develop national training standards, accreditation processes, skills training and competence assessment. The aim of these two bodies, in liaison with the State authorities, is to improve access to education and training, including bridging and remedial training for the overseas qualified.

In this way the government's efforts to fund a series of ESL programs is being complemented by its National Policy on Languages, which supports the teaching of LOTE through its Australian Second Language Learning Program. This double-pronged linguistic effort and other culture-oriented measures might signal a new appreciation that effective economic initiatives are best planned within society's multicultural envelope and its over-arching values (Smolicz, 1984, 1989). For such reasons there is a need to reassess the benefits (as well as setbacks) which have flowed from the multicultural and language policies that successive Australian governments have tried to develop.

Languages in Australian Multiculturalism

Following the Whitlam years, multicultural policies gained

official acceptance through their personal advocacy by Malcolm Fraser, (1981), when he spoke about,

> ethnic cultural differences set within a framework of shared fundamental values which enables them to co-exist on a complementary rather than competitive basis.

The culture of each group was to be given the opportunity to contribute at least some of its elements to the country's heritage and hence to exert an influence upon the future development of Australia's overarching framework of values (Smolicz, 1984). There were also moves to take advantage of the linguistic resources of the country, represented by those bilingual individuals who, in addition to English, spoke what has come to be termed as "community languages other than English" (CLOTE) (Clyne, 1982, 1988).

There are good reasons why former fears of Australian bilinguals as divisive should lose much of their former force. Objections to the continued existence of languages other than English have stemmed from misgivings that their purpose is to supplant English. There has been insufficient recognition of the real objective, namely a desire to foster additive bilingualism (or even multilingualism), by enabling young Australians to internalise an important aspect of multi-culturalism within their minds and hearts. All research evidence points to the fact that English has been accepted as an unquestioned part of the over-arching system of values (Marjoribanks, 1979, 1980) - a situation that has been previously noted as distinguishing Australia from the European Community, where no one single language can make that claim.

Over recent years, other languages have been gaining acceptance

alongside English. In this way people have been given the opportunity to participate in the mainstream of Australian life, while acquiring literacy in other tongues, some of which they already speak in their homes, but which they can also use in their businesses in Australia and with their trading partners overseas. This has given rise to a more positive image of Australian bilinguals, and the role which they can play as cultural bridges that link different communities within Australia with those overseas, thus conferring important economic as well as socio-cultural benefits upon the country.

Economic benefits have seemed to be linked to cultural and civic advantages as well, since, rather than being frustrated due to illiteracy in their home tongues, those who took advantage of the increased teaching of community languages in schools often considered themselves to be the proud possessors of two or more literary heritages which enabled them to contribute creatively to Australian society in a variety of fields and walks of life, including trade and economics. The image of the "home language" as invariably a handicap, rather than as an advantage, has been brought into question by the results of a large scale quantitative study conducted by Power in South Australia in 1986 and subsequently analysed by Robertson. This showed that "where a language other than English was spoken by a parent, that particular characteristic had a positive and strongly significant effect in the propensity to apply to enrol in a tertiary education institution" (Blandy, 1988, p.34).

There exists yet another reason why Australia can afford to indulge in supporting linguistic pluralism with greater confidence than many countries in Europe and elsewhere. The reason lies in Australia's unique position in the world as a continent governed by a

single political entity. Furthermore, there has been no suspicion that the linguistic and cultural demands of any minority linguistic group shrouded political motives of separatism or secession, since Australian territorial integrity has never been in doubt. This acceptance of linguistic pluralism as a positive aspect of Australian society seems to represent an "affordable tolerance" for the country as a whole. In this regard Australia differs from the U.S.S.R. where the overarching framework of values based upon Lenin's (let alone Stalin's) interpretation of Marxist theory, is increasingly questioned (Kolack, 1987, p.38), and where ethnolinguistic forces tend to be centrifugal and carry with them an unmistakable territorial threat of whole nations seceding from the Union.

An Aboriginal View of Multiculturalism

Australia's growing self-confidence and the gradual acceptance of LOTEs within Australian society have also had its effect upon Aboriginal people. Many (if not most) of their spokespeople have remained aloof from the multicultural "movement", because of their long-ingrained suspicion of the way even the finest sounding government policies "have turned out to be something else" at the implementation level. As the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia (1989, p.15) formally states, "unwitting systematic discrimination occurs when cultural assumptions become embodied in society's established institutions and processes" - and it is these processes that can impede even the most progressive reform. Where attitudinal barriers are compounded by structural impediments, such as the lack of access to education and training - they discriminate against Aboriginals in their ability to study within their own terms of reference, which include their own languages and cultures. Such

educational handicaps have limited Aboriginals' ability to influence the decisions that affect them, reinforcing the unequal distribution of economic resources and power (Gale et al. 1987).

Nevertheless, in the new climate created by policies of multiculturalism, Aboriginality, too, has increasingly become more than a matter of race, by extending its focus to include culture and language. As Dr. Eve Fesl, (1988) Director of Koorie Research Centre at Monash University and the first Aboriginal woman to hold a Ph.D. from an Australian University, put it to an audience consisting principally of non-Aboriginal Australians of non-English speaking background :

> Before you came under post-war immigration schemes, we were the only large group of peoples who were seen to be different. Because we were not English, we were made to feel ashamed, of our languages, of our cultures, and we were indoctrinated into feeling ashamed of the colour of our skin.
>
> When you, your parents, and your grandparents arrived, you dared to speak in public, a language other than English, although you were the recipients of abuse, as we had been for decades.
>
> By your example of showing pride in your heritage and (ignoring) those who said that to be different to Anglo-culture was deficit, you made us reconsider OUR position, as to develop in ourselves a pride in being different. You helped us to re-learn not to be ashamed of our cultures, our languages and to be proud of being Black.

Dr. Fesl (1989a) has just completed a pilot project on the teaching of Aboriginal languages in schools, with the aim of reversing

the trend towards extinction which all these languages continue to display. It is her hope that Aboriginal people (or Koories in her terminology), will no longer be "assimilated into becoming second class citizens [who are expected to] provide a menial workforce for the settlers", or be socialized into the white "work ethic". It is still the reality, however, that in the few schools, where Aboriginal languages are being taught, these are often not the languages spoken by the Aboriginal children attending that particular school. Moreover, they are often taught within the context of a social studies curriculum by white teachers who tend to rely upon Aboriginal teacher-aides to help them teach the Aboriginal language components.

Dr. Fesl (1989b) sees as the greatest threat the "pidginisation of the languages, by basing their teaching on the English word order". It must, nevertheless be a matter of satisfaction to see the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia (1989, p.37) declare that the twenty Aboriginal languages (which are classified as still "healthy") "need to be accorded a pre-eminent position [since] it is through the preservation of spoken language that the cultural integrity of Aboriginal Australians can be maintained and developed". No other minority tongue, not even German or Italian, has received such unstinted official recognition of its importance as an integrating function in the life of a group of Australians. But the Koorie people, such as Eve Fesl, will now be watching for the actual implementation of these fine sentiments.

Language Education and Multiculturalism

People associated with the Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia (FECCA) were, rather like the Aboriginals,

disappointed at the way at least some of Fraser's multicultural reforms were being implemented, especially in relation to education. While there was some degree of Federal government funding for part-time "ethnic schools", as community-sponsored language teaching institutions (Norst, 1983), as well as an increase in funding for the teaching of some languages (such as Greek and Italian) in mainstream schools, support for the teaching of community languages throughout the educational system remained rather half-hearted.

Some leaders of the majority group were never convinced about the economic benefits of cultural and especially linguistic, pluralism. To them the modest funding of community-owned ethnic schools appeared the cheapest way to teach these languages, while keeping the minorities "happy". This happiness was not universal, since there were fears that such privatisation of language education would lead to its marginalisation. What is more, a suspicion lurked that restrictions placed upon the teaching of languages in mainstream schools were more than an economy measure, but designed to leave the majority group "undisturbed".

This ambivalence toward cultural pluralism was not a new thing in the Australian heritage, but had shown itself from the beginning of the British settlement. In this sense Whitlam's and Fraser's espousing of multiculturalism was a reactivation of the more pluralist climate at the end of the nineteenth century, when there was a flourishing press in languages other than English (especially German), and over a hundred bilingual schools operating (Clyne, 1985). This efflorescence of pluralism was not suppressed by any internal danger of ethnic fragmentation, but rather by the imported xenophobia that was an echo of the conflict between the nations of Europe during World

War I and later World War II (Selleck, 1980). Even in the current decade this ethnocentric tradition has tended to demonstrate its continued existence, although admittedly in much more muted and diverse form (Blainey, 1986, 1989).

Another misinterpretation of multiculturalism limits it to no more than the preservation of "ethnic identity". This approach fails to recognize that the "feeling of belonging", in order to last, has to be transmitted to subsequent generations, in a way that amounts to more than romantic musings on the past. To perpetuate itself and retain its meaning, ethnic identity needs a solid cultural substratum - and one which only the core of the culture concerned can supply. In the case of language-centred cultures, such as Greek, Polish, Latvian, Vietnamese - the communities concerned, in order to survive and contribute to multi-cultural Australia, have no alternative but to insist on the teaching and use of their languages. While it is recognised that language education is more costly than folkloric festivals, it is also accepted that the elimination of linguistic cores reduces the cultures concerned to ethnic remnants or empty shells that lack creative potential or economic value (Skutnabb Kangas, 1984; Smolicz and Secombe, 1988, 1989). Hence the ultimate cost to the community of the loss of cultural resources following assimilation is likely to be far greater than the cost of education in community languages.

Comparative studies on plural societies confirm that cultural assimilation instead of increasing social mobility may actually be used to ensure economic dependence of the minorities which, in turn, may stimulate feelings of frustration, leading either to separatism or violence. Such violence was experienced in South Africa in Soweto in

1976 "when Black students protested against a requirement that their lessons be taught in Afrikaans" (Perlez, 1989). It was the imposition of the dominant tongue upon unwilling subordinate ethnic groups that triggered riots in which 575 people were killed. In Australia, this sense of frustration has been felt most keenly by Aboriginal communities. Hence their current attempt to escape their former economic and cultural subservience (Fesl, 1988) by engaging in a painstaking process of "reconstruction as well as adaptation". As Jordan (1984) puts it, Aboriginal peoples "must sift and revivify the practices of the Aboriginal Law, the authority structures and the song cycles, and recreate an Aboriginal world of meaning within which a secure identity may be established." The European and Asian derived minority communities in Australia would prefer to safeguard themselves against a similar fate, and to maintain their existing core values, rather than subsequently reconstruct, their lost heritages.

It remains the wish of ethnic organizations to help minority ethnic Australians to preserve their dignity, to be themselves, and to enter Australian society, not empty handed, but bearing cultural gifts, some of them directly convertible into economic terms - chief among them being their linguistic resources. Maintenance of cultural continuity makes economic sense by building upon the languages which are already being used in many Australian homes, and thereby unlocking the bilingual potential of one eighth of the nation (Clyne, 1988).

Australian Multiculturalism within the Asian Context

Given the federal structure of Australia and the differences among the States, one cannot speak of uniformity in multicultural policies, although policies adopted by Commonwealth can set the

tone for the whole country. In 1988 the Prime Minister (Hawke, 1988, September 16,) acknowledged the cultural dimension, of Australian ethnic diversity when he called for "basic rights of freedom from discrimination, equality of opportunity, the development of language skills, and the fostering of the rich variety of our cultural traditions".

There is every hope that in the future such statements will be reflected more clearly at the implementation level, so that funding is directed to languages spoken in the Australian community, as well as to those languages which are labelled as "trade", and "Asian", and which are almost invariably assumed to be "non-community" and foreign. The narrowness of this interpretation of economic relevance is based upon the simplistic belief in a direct relationship between a smattering of some foreign language and an automatic trade surplus with the country concerned. This "trade aspect" is often given as a reason for diverting resources from Asian community languages, such as Vietnamese or Khmer, which perversely seem hardly "Asian", in terms of the current drive for "Asia literacy". To insist on regarding "Asian" as synonymous with "trade", and then select Chinese as a foreign language, is to ignore the presence in Australia of some 140,000 Australians who use a Chinese language as their home tongue, (Jupp, 1988, p.971), and for whom it has a "community", rather than "foreign" (or simply "trade") connotation. The significance of Chinese for trade is in fact partly because it is also "community" - a name that indicates that the Australian traders concerned can readily communicate with their former Asian homeland, whose "cultural envelope" of customs and ways of life they understand. (Smolicz, Lee, Murugaian and Secombe, 1990).

The particular label given to a language could be dismissed as

of no particular importance, but its practical implications become clear in the educational arena. In this regard some higher educational institutions ignore the pedagogic problem of distinguishing between the needs of those who start from scratch and those who already speak a particular language in their homes (even if they use its dialect form and may initially lack literacy in it). The approach that is frequently adopted at a university level is to organise the teaching of Chinese as if all the students were absolute beginners; furthermore, the "foreign language" assumption ignores not only the native speakers, but also disregards the probability that an increasing number of students (from whatever ethnic background) have studied it at school, and possibly have matriculated in it. It stands to reason that to ignore the cultural resources which Chinese speakers represent in Australia flies in the face of the goals of economic development and an increase in trade relations with Asia.

The case of "foreign language" labelling illustrates the contention that when economic goals are stripped of their cultural context, the goals themselves are undermined in the process. The economic and cultural losses are in this instance sustained together. The cultural context of multicultural Australia is being sacrificed along with the country's greater chances of economic growth, for the sake of satisfying tacitly held ethno-centric forebodings about permanent Asian residents in Australia, which are an echo of some of the least attractive episodes from the past that fed on fears of "alien ethnicity" (Selleck, 1980, Harmstorf, 1983). Indeed, the denial of the significance of the cultural envelope in economic growth may be more apparent than real, since it takes the Anglo-Celtic complexion of that envelope as a given. Indeed, its normality is so all-pervading that it hardly needs any explanation or mention. The presupposition of a fixed Anglo-Australian cultural envelope and neglect of its multicultural complexity is detrimental to the needs of

the economy, which also coincides with the legitimate aspirations of a large proportion of Australians from other ancestries who desire to maintain their cultural and linguistic heritages.

Latent ethnocentrism may be perceived as overriding the potential economic benefits of plurality in the attitudes of those protagonists of Asian languages who are not overly concerned with extending the hand of friendship to Asian Australians by building upon their linguistic and cultural resources. Similar subterranean springs seem to feed, the attitudes that have surfaced periodically during bouts of the so-called "migrant debate" in relation to the ethnic composition of the intake. In 1988 the Prime Minister himself warned that the drop of applicants from Asia (especially from Hong Kong and Malaysia) under the Business Migration Scheme, was probably due to the negative overtones in that year's migration debate. There is a danger that a similar, if unintended, impression may be created even by such a well meaning report, as that produced by the Asian Studies Council (1988). This could be unfortunately misinterpreted as implying that we are almost entirely an Anglo-Saxon nation, which must finally wake up to being geographically in Asia and start acquiring "Asia knowledge", in the form of foreign languages and other "Asia-related skills".

There is little doubt that Asian confidence in Australia depends partly upon the way Australian internal multicultural policies are implemented. A clear statement on the need to develop internal resources in Asian languages and cultures, as an important contribution to interaction with Asian nations, would reassure our neighbours that Australia is genuine in its relationship with them. Australia could then set about implementing the recommendations on

developing "Asia-related skills" with greater confidence about the success of such ventures. A request that some three-quarters of Australian company executives with Asian businesses, together with most of their marketing staff, should have such skills by 1995-2000, could then be taken in the context of greater appreciation of the skills and experiences of Australians of a variety of Asian cultural backgrounds.

It would seem that unless the "internal" multicultural reality is fully utilized as part of Australia's attempts to come closer to Asia, the "external" cultural and educational efforts may prove inadequate to meet the hopes that are currently placed in them. The learning of Asian languages as "foreign" tongues by whole cohorts of pupils at an elementary level may have less impact on economic development and on the complexity of trade pathways than is expected by the advocates of a such massive, though only moderately funded program. Such a program may in fact prove no more successful than former British efforts to master the language of their much closer neigbour and trading partner - France! In commenting upon the Ingelson Report (Inquiry into the Teaching of Asian Studies and Languages in Higher Education, 1989, para 4.11). the Chairman of the Centre of Asian Studies at the University of Adelaide, (McCormack, 1989), noted that "the system which is to be hugely expanded offers students an average of 504 contact hours of instruction [in Japanese] over three years, while the best available evidence suggests a minimum of 2,400 hours is necessary, i.e. approximately five times the current practice".

Doubts about an increasingly mass-production oriented strategy which does not offer the opportunity of functional fluency in the language, and divorces language from culture studies, have caused McCormack (1989) to express his scepticism about the effectiveness of

some of the policies advocated in the Asia Council and Ingelson reports. He fears that only a tiny proportion of students encouraged by the reports to undertake studies of an Asian language is likely to achieve "functional linguistic competence, true literacy" :

> The expectation of improved economic performance flowing from expanded Asian language programmes should be weighed against the possibilities of contracts bungled, treaties misunderstood and diplomatic incidents occasioned by incompetents pushed forward to justify the programme; losses might outweigh gains (at the 'front-line' level).

The Unlocking of Australia's Linguistic Resources.

These cautionary comments should not be interpreted as an invitation to abandon Australia's drive for increased language education, but as admonition against hasty improvisation. The danger is that unless the program is soundly based it could become a fad, to be discarded after the initial enthusiasm wears off. In the first instance, a language should not be taught "naked", stripped of the cultural envelope which is so important in understanding Asian society and economy. There is a need for properly qualified teachers who are attuned to the various abilities and interests of students - whether native speakers of the tongue concerned; those who have studied the language from an early date; or those who are starting it from scratch. In this regard, Australia is in a better position than mono-cultural societies that lack our linguistic resources, which need only to be developed in order to maximise the benefits of bilingualism for each individual, and for the country as a whole.

As Lo Bianco (1989, p.12) points out, the educational task to achieve this vision of multiculturalism must involve the refinement and direct utilisation of the linguistic resources and skills of students, some of whom bring their bilingualism from home to school. These resources could be of value to Australia,

> either as an enriched base from which students could acquire the specific cultural and language skills which are in demand but which are not widely available among the population (eg. Japanese), or they would be of direct use if they coincide with practical economic needs (eg. Chinese, Indonesian, Italian, Spanish and German).

To achieve the desired goals, Lo Bianco (pp.13-15) advocates the construction of a curriculum with an internationalist orientation that builds upon the existing pluralism of skills and knowledge over which students have mastery.

> The repertoire of such a curriculum involves both linguistic and cultural elements (..) Students must be able to be linguistically competent for the communication demands of the modern world; or the region of the world with which their society identifies, in Australia's case, Europe, and increasingly Asia. This means the learning of at least one additional language (...)
>
> For non-English speaking background children (...) the international perspective extends the repertoire further. It could do this by requiring the learning of an Asian language, Esperanto, or additional major world language. It ought to aim, however, to extend an existing repertoire rather than replacing components of it with a dominant and imposed language. By doing this it will be empowering students with a linguistic "range" appropriate to the full gamut of possible socio-cultural contexts.

From this perspective, school language programs are to be regarded in Hawkins' terms as an "apprenticeship" in language learning since a bilingual learner is assumed to have an additional capacity for successfully acquiring other languages which may become nationally significant at some future date. This also applies to bilingualism and biculturalism acquired in the home, since these attributes can predispose individuals not only to deepen the knowledge they already

possess but to go further and acquire additional linguistic and cultural skills that society needs for its trade and economic purposes.

The former South Australian Minister of Ethnic Affairs (Sumner, p.12) offered a clear directive for the future development of the cultural and linguistic resources, that are currently locked within Australia's multi-ethnic population :

> There is little doubt that the major international phenomenon of the next twenty years and beyond will be increasing inter-dependence in all its facets.... This will involve recognizing the social and economic advantages our multicultural community gives Australia. All this means investing in our cultural base, in maintaining our linguistic and cultural diversity through a national languages policy, and placing much greater value on developing our human capital resources. In an increasingly inter-dependent world if you speak another language you have an asset which should not be lost. Australia has that asset.

Sumner's and Lo Bianco's arguments that a plural cultural base already exists in Australia and is fundamental to Australia's economic, as well as social, development finds an echo in postulates advanced by the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia (1989). It lists the economic costs that can arise where members of a multicultural society fail to communicate across cultures, a point made earlier in relation to the European Community. This cost "may manifest itself in the frustration of youthful talent in the classroom, and in friction or misunderstanding in the workplace". An even greater economic cost may be paid by a society where "incidents of prejudice, antagonism and hostility occur based on racial and cultural differences" (Agenda Focus 1989, p.3). The Agenda (p.15) acknowledges that any signs of prejudice and tension may have detrimental effects not only inside, but also outside the

country, since "there may be an immediate cost in terms of overseas perceptions of Australia", and hence an effect on both its migration program and trade relations.

The National Agenda (Focus, 1989, p.3) also laments the long neglect of the multicultural context of Australian society in that, "The potential of two million Australians (immigrants and their children, as well as Aboriginals) who already speak a second language goes almost unrecognized and unutilized". The majority of Australians from minority linguistic backgrounds are bilingual, more than one in four of them being Australian-born. The Agenda (1989, p.40) notes that, "the potential national benefits of this resource are little understood [and that] this capital investment in language is often dependent on the family home and after-hours ethnic schools". By neglecting these languages in the cultural sense, Australia has been harmed from an economic point of view, most conspicuously through the loss of potential to facilitate trade with the rest of the world.

Acknowledging the fact that one in four members of the Australian workforce are first and second generation migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds, the present government's newly declared multicultural policy adopts a triple goal. In this, the right of people to maintain their cultural heritage and receive equal treatment and opportunity are linked to the need for economic efficiency, perceived as the development and full use of the skills and talents of all Australians, whatever their cultural or racial background.

For their part, ethnic minority groups have themselves contributed to evolving a model of multiculturalism compatible with the Agenda's goals, in that it is grounded in their own cultures, but

also set in the wider Australian social and economic context. This seeks to ensure that ethnic cultural maintenance is not used as a reason for disadvantaging the minorities in the social and occupational fields. Instead, it can act as a catalyst for the economic development of the whole society (Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia, 1985).

The policies advocated by the Agenda are most likely to succeed economically and to satisfy the aspirations of all sections of the community, if they release the full range of human resources that remain encapsulated within the multicultural envelope of Australian society.

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